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Soviet VulnerabilitiesSUMMARY

The slowdown in economic growth represents the most visible and serious challenge to the Soviet regime. Although the dimensions of this problem are the subject of continuing controversy in the West, it is clear that economic constraints will have serious implications for virtually every area of Soviet political, economic and social life. High rates of growth in the 1960s and 1970s permitted the leadership to satisfy the demands of key interest groups and bureaucracies, but low growth in the 1980s will intensify the competition among rival claimants. Low growth will make it more difficult for the leadership to make improvements in consumer welfare at a time when increased knowledge of Eastern European living standards serve as a reference point for rising consumer expectations. [REDACTED]

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In fact, there is mounting evidence that the economic slowdown has been accompanied by increasing consumer discontent and by a perceived decline in quality of life. While posing no immediate challenge to the regime, increasing alienation and cynicism among the young and other social ills (crime, corruption and alcoholism) will have a detrimental impact on Soviet economic goals. A poorly

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managed health care system and increasing adult and infant mortality rates will also impact directly on the size and efficiency of the work force. Moreover, rapid industrialization and urbanization--products of economic advancement--are themselves adding to the social problems confronting the Soviet Union.

Lastly, and potentially the most serious vulnerability is ethnic discontent. Although there is now no widespread, politically disruptive protest among Soviet nationality groups, the potential for unrest and sporadic violence, especially in the Baltic republics, remains high. Ethnic tensions rooted in cultural and political suppression could grow due to increasing competition for scarce resources.

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Slowing Economic Growth and Its Societal Impact

The list of growing economic woes in the USSR includes declining increments to the labor force, slowing growth of capital stock, raw material shortages and transportation bottlenecks. Despite obvious dissatisfaction with the poor performance of the economy, the Soviet leadership does not appear prepared to squarely face the issue of economic reform. The accelerated public discussion in the USSR of the necessity for economic change which accompanied Andropov's succession has so far resulted in only limited economic experiments to reduce the number of plan indicators and expand somewhat the decisionmaking power of enterprises. This modest tinkering with the system has left untouched the inflexible pricing mechanism and central plan. Although some Soviet officials have called for a closer look at East European experiments, i.e., marketization along the "Hungarian" lines, they continue to rely on the labor discipline campaign to increase economic efficiency and boost productivity. General Secretary Chernenko acknowledged in his Supreme Soviet election speech, however, that increased discipline will not be sufficient to sustain long term economic improvement. [REDACTED] 25X1

Given the bureaucratic inertia of the Soviet leadership and the real political costs involved in economic decentralization, Soviet economic growth will most likely continue at low levels

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through the 1980s. Such growth rates will heighten competition for resources among interest groups and create a tense political climate. Soviet planners may be forced to make costly tradeoffs in attempting to increase investment, maintain consumption levels, keep up allocations to agriculture and avoid cutbacks in the growth of military spending. To reduce growth in consumption would have a negative impact on worker morale and productivity and might ultimately threaten the stability of the Soviet system. To reduce growth in defense spending, particularly at a time of leadership transition, would be equally difficult, since those vying for power would probably be reluctant to press for actions that run counter to the biases of political and military officials alike. [REDACTED]

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The Beleaguered Consumer

Anecdotal reports from US embassy officers, foreign correspondents, emigres, Western journalists, and Soviet citizens underscore the continuing--and worsening--inadequacy of consumer goods production in the Soviet Union. Shopping is a particular ordeal with hours spent in long lines often to acquire clearly inferior goods. A Moscow resident reported that even toilet tissue had to be reserved by filling out special forms. Personal items--soap, toothpaste, razor blades--can be completely lacking even in major urban areas. Shortages extend to big ticket items, as well: in the 1970s Moscow residents were forced to wait two to ten years to get an apartment. [REDACTED]

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The most pressing consumer demand appears to be for improvement in the diet and particularly for increased amounts of fresh meat. Soviet data show that the gap between meat supply and demand has increased 12 percent since 1975. Since the late 1970s a series of agricultural failures has led to acute spot shortages across the entire range of food items. In May 1982, [redacted]

[redacted] meat was being rationed throughout Central Asia, a practice also reported in other areas of the Soviet Union. In a small number of cases food shortages have precipitated incidents of worker unrest. Strikes in Tolyatti and Gorki in 1981, reportedly were ended only when special food distribution centers were established at industrial plants. [redacted]

Adding to the problem of consumer shortages is the failure of Soviet industry to maintain even minimal standards of quality control. Soviet merchandise is often poorly made--a fact widely recognized by the average citizen. Friends and relatives traveling outside the USSR are routinely asked to buy consumer goods, even from Eastern Europe, as these are automatically assumed to be superior to items produced at home. In the mid-1970s [redacted]

[redacted] acknowledged this problem and stated that the demand for high quality goods was rising. [redacted]

Soviet citizens are dismayed, moreover, by the perceived disparity in Soviet and East European living standards. []

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[] in questions posed to propagandists at public lectures they frequently question the necessity of Soviet subsidies to their Warsaw pact allies in view of the higher standard of living that these countries are thought to have. []

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Soviet citizens are also aware that the burden of consumer shortages is not shared equally--a perception that exacerbates discontent. High party officials are entitled to shop at special stores closed to the general public. These stores insulate the Soviet aristocracy from chronic shortages, endless waiting in line, rude service and other harassments that daily plague ordinary folk. They also provide the elite with all kinds of goods the proletariat never lays eyes on and at cut-rate prices--French cognac, German radios, Japanese cameras, imported chocolates, etc. These privileges are carefully parceled out according to rank, with the very top leaders eligible for the "Kremlin ration"--enough food to feed their families luxuriously every month, for free. Status determines access to other scarce goods, as well with access to new housing and cars based on employment, bureaucratic position, personal connections and bribery. []

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Corruption and the Second Economy

The inefficiencies of the Soviet economic system have produced a burgeoning second economy that, according to US academic experts account for 25 percent of the Soviet GNP. For the average citizen, bribery or "blat" has become an essential element for making daily life possible--providing desired goods where the state does not.

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High level involvement in corruption is also extensive. The political elite seem to have developed a caste mentality and are strongly motivated by a desire to preserve and extend their privileges, especially for their children. Leonid Brezhnev was a prime offender in this regard, promoting the career of both his son and son-in-law despite their reported involvement in corrupt practices. Certain universities and institutes have become recognized as the province of party, government and military elites for their offspring, where blat is a key entrance requirement and ghost-written theses for the "golden youth" are the rule.

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Among the more conscientious segments of the leadership, many officials fear that corruption--fueled by the inadequacies of the planned economy--is itself eroding the party's legitimacy, undermining public respect for law and order and diminishing the party's capacity to get the country moving again.

described

communism as "fighting for its life against inefficiency and corruption." He emphasized that the struggle against this internal weakness was the biggest threat the Soviets faced. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] described the last years of Brezhnev's rule as one of total paralysis, citing his inability to remove corrupt officials who were personally close to him. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] also indicates that elites holding jobs in nonparty institutions are increasingly speaking out against party abuses of power. [REDACTED] at least some military officers believe the party has lost its ideological bearings and many young government officials have lost confidence in the party's ability to deal with critical economic problems. [REDACTED]

Impact of Consumer Discontent

Dissatisfaction with the living standard lowers productivity and promotes economic inefficiency in a variety of ways. City dwellers take long lunch hours to shop in order to avoid longer lines after work. Material deprivations and inconvenience contributes to a general malaise in the work force that also lowers productivity, such as when wage incentives lose their effectiveness because quality goods are scarce. As Brezhnev acknowledged at the 25th Party Congress, "increased incomes alone do not mean a real increase in living standards." The shortage of a number of goods reduces the possibility of material labor incentives. Corruption

and the "black market" further weaken the social fabric, divert resources and threaten control. [REDACTED]

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Beyond the impact on labor productivity, dashed consumer expectations could have more far-reaching consequences for the Soviet system. For much of the post-Stalin period, the combination of improved living standards, stable prices for basic commodities, job security and opportunities for social advancement formed the basic ingredients in a tacit "social contract" between the regime and its people ensuring political stability. A decline in the rate of growth of consumption or--even worse--a drop in the standard of living eventually could threaten that social contract and with it the acceptance of the leadership's legitimacy. [REDACTED]

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Regime Response

The regime has reacted to some of these problems as if it believes there is a linkage between popular perceptions of well-being and political stability. In a September 1981 article appearing in the authoritative journal Kommunist, Konstantin Chernenko warned that the party's disregard for the "social interests of any class is fraught with the danger of social tension and of political and socio-economic crisis." Brezhnev also demonstrated considerable apprehension about the popular mood. In 1981 he described the food supply as the central "political" problem of the current Five-Year Plan. Perhaps in response to this perception in the leadership, a food program, established in 1982,

was designed to translate higher farm spending into more food for the consumer. [REDACTED]

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During Andropov's short tenure a number of additional actions were announced to improve consumer well-being. The service sectors operating hours were extended to make shopping less of a burden for the public. The recently announced 1984 economic plan features higher output targets and resources for the consumer, with production of consumer goods slated to increase four percent. A special consumer goods program is also being developed for the next Five Year Plan. Most recently the Politburo announced that an experiment was underway in the consumer goods and service sectors of several regions of the Russian Republic to improve overall efficiency. [REDACTED]

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The regime has also employed the traditional palliatives of ideological exhortation combined with measures to increase discipline. Many of Andropov's initiatives appear designed to increase personal responsibility and accountability throughout the system. [REDACTED]

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Andropov's campaign against corruption, however, was even more dramatic evidence of this approach. In a number of well-orchestrated public relations moves including a visit to workers in a Moscow factory, dismissal of several government and party officials for less than adequate job performance (if not outright criminal activity), and media exposes, Andropov sought to shake off

the lethargy of the late Brezhnev years and dramatically call a halt to the lax personnel policies of his predecessor. The regime obviously hoped that such actions would improve economic efficiency and increase economic productivity from the managerial level on down. [REDACTED]

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Moreover, his anticorruption campaign sought to refurbish the party's standing with ordinary Soviet citizens. Brezhnev's tolerance of corrupt and incompetent officials had increased the resentment of ordinary citizens who do not have the "political pull" necessary to take a short cut to the good life. Particularly in the wake of Poland, the Soviet leadership has gone to some lengths to demonstrate that the flaunting of privilege will not be tolerated and that officials are not above the law. The death sentence imposed on the former director of Moscow's gastronom No. 1, once a purveyor of delicacies to the Soviet elite, was a strong signal of Andropov's intent to crackdown on corruption in high places. [REDACTED]

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It is still too early to determine how vigorously Chernenko will pursue this strategy, although his election speech strongly endorsed it as a line "which will be pursued permanently and rigorously." The expulsion of a Deputy Minister of Tractor and Agricultural Machine Building for abuse of office announced on 7 March indicates at least that the policy still remains in force. Yet the utility of the campaign is limited by the fact that so many

higher officials, including those representing Chernenko's main power base (the party apparatus), are vulnerable to corruption charges and therefore likely to resist anything more than a cosmetic drive to purify the party. []

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The regime's attempts to diffuse consumer dissatisfaction also are being undercut by the psychology of rising expectations. In the past, the Soviet leadership has confronted a relatively pliant populace, whose material expectations were modest and whose acquiescence and inertia in the face of disappointment are historically documented. Improvements in the standard of living, however, have whetted the appetite for continued improvements. Increasing contact with the West and even comparisons with Eastern Europe have caused Soviet citizens to be less appreciative of their lot and more resentful of government policy. While the older generation is still probably inclined to compare the present situation with the stark deprivation of the pre-war and immediate post war years, the younger generation seems much less inclined to use this standard of comparison. They are particularly attracted to Western fashions and products and measure progress by how much their standard of living improved from one year to the next. []

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Social Malaise

The Soviet leadership is also faced with a growing social malaise that reflects underlying social discontent as a prime cause

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of lagging productivity growth, and undermines regime policies. These could become even more troublesome for the regime during a period of economic slowdown. Increasing alienation and cynicism, especially among young people and other social ills--crime, corruption and alcoholism--are likely to increase. The pervasive police powers of the state when coupled with the population's traditional passivity towards depravation should be sufficient to maintain political control, but reliance on administrative controls and repression will not reverse the malaise. The Soviet leadership will be challenged to avoid the continuing erosion of the "quality of life" that has become the regime's real basis for legitimacy.

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Youth Alienation

The gap between aspirations and the ability of Soviet society to fulfill them appears to be fueling a loss of faith in the Communist dream that is particularly pronounced among the young. In a poll [redacted] in February 1982, Soviet youth demonstrated a desire for material comfort and a stable career that is in striking contrast to official emphasis on "socially productive labor" as the key indicator of success. While 46 percent of those questioned [redacted] chose "favorite work and the respect of their comrades" as their goal, a group almost as large (34 percent) named the "quality and prestige of their possessions" as their definition of success. Such

materialism suggests a failure of socialist propaganda and official ideology. [REDACTED]

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Leadership statements underscore concern for such attitudes, not only because they lead to political apathy but also because they increase young peoples' susceptibility to foreign influences. At an ideological plenum held last June, Chernenko enumerated the shortcomings of Soviet youth as: "failure to understand their civic duties, political naivete, parasitism and a refusal to work where necessary for society." A public lecture held in Moscow in January repeated Chernenko's attacks on the corruptive influence of Western ideas on Soviet young people and advocated more effective internal propaganda--a summons enthusiastically taken up by Komsomolskaya Pravda (the newspaper of the young Communist League). [REDACTED]

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The revival of religion among the young also appears to be an increasing worry for the leadership. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Andropov was specifically concerned about this issue. Statements by various republic party officials indicate that religious sects are becoming more active and successfully attracting younger members into their congregations. According to [REDACTED] the number of persons marrying in the church and submitting to the rite of baptism is increasing. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was also sufficiently concerned about this problem to direct party workers to pay more attention to atheistic work. [REDACTED]

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Finally, Soviet officials have deplored the growing evidence of pacifism on the home front. Marshal Ogarkov, Chief of the General Staff, complained in a speech given at a 1981 ideological conference that Soviet young people were underrating the threat of war emanating from the West. Reporting after the invasion of Afghanistan suggested that some young people were attempting to avoid the draft. Such examples could indicate that Soviet young people are less willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to maintain a high degree of military readiness. [REDACTED]

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Violent Crime

While economic crimes are vexing for the regime, involving as they do a large segment of the Soviet elite, violent crime appears to be on the rise as well. The magnitude of the problem is reflected in increased press coverage of this problem. In 1981, Pravda reported an upsurge in street crime in Eastern Siberia, blaming prosecutors, police and the lax attitude of the public. Official concern also is reflected in the recently announced changes in the criminal code, stressing longer periods of confinement for unlawful acts. [REDACTED]

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Official ideology is hard pressed to explain the upsurge in violent crime, as such behavior is considered to be a by-product of bourgeois influences that in theory have been eliminated. As Soviet press commentaries and sociological studies themselves

indicate, however, alcohol abuse, family instability and low educational levels are major causes. A 1971 study of crime in Moscow found that 70 percent of those convicted of homicide committed their crimes while drunk. [REDACTED]

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Some of the social problems contributing to crime--the high divorce rate, for example--are part of the price of increasing industrialization and urbanization, and Soviet officials can do little to mitigate their impact. In the case of alcohol abuse, the regimes' vested interest in preserving political control may conflict with its desire to reduce alcohol consumption and its related crimes. Pent-up social discontent is more easily managed if it is confined to public drunkenness and domestic disturbances rather than taking the form of political demonstration or protest. [REDACTED]

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The Role of Women and the Family

"Our problem now is to do away with the family and to free women from the care of children. Women grow worn out in the petty household work, their strength dissipated, their minds growing narrow and stale...The backwardness of women, their lack of understanding for the revolutionary ideals of man decrease his joy and determination to fight." Lenin - 1920 [REDACTED]

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Certain aspects of the Marxist-Leninist creed do not sit comfortably on Russian culture and the disappearance of the

individual family is one of them. Early Soviet theoreticians attacked the reactionary "bourgeois" family in order to liberate women and serve the political goals of the regime. Young people would be properly schooled in the virtues of the collectivity, with selfish individual interests brought under control. Traditional child care functions would be taken over by the state, freeing women to enter the labor force and help "build socialism." []

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The attack on the traditional family was all but abandoned in WW II, but, due to a variety of pressures, the family today is ill-equipped to deal with many of the problems characteristic of modern society,--divorce, alcoholism, youth alienation, etc. Although the Soviet Union has the highest female labor force participation rates of any industrial society, the government has not delivered on its promise to lessen the burden of childcare and housework. According to Soviet data, although men and women devote equal time to paid employment, women devote an extra 28 hours a week to housework compared to 12 for men. While the high percentage of women working outside the home has greatly supported the leadership's goal of rapid economic development, women have not moved up the career ladder on par with men and their salaries are only 65 to 75 percent those of their male co-workers. []

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The failure of official policy to substantially improve the quality of life for Soviet women explains in large part the falling birth rate. Soviet women, particularly in European Russia, are

having fewer children and increasing numbers of abortions to keep their family size small. The task of creating a stable family appears fraught with so much difficulty that, as recent articles in Noviy Mir suggest, some women are rejecting marriage and childbearing altogether. The falling birth rate impacts adversely on the country's labor resources and the leadership's goal of economic success. Rising levels of alcoholism and drug abuse among Soviet women, additional indicators of discontent, also weaken the family's ability to provide a stable environment and inculcate proper socialist attitudes in the young. [REDACTED]

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Divorce rates are high as well. According to a number of Soviet sociologists the family is shrinking, dissolving and doing a poor job of creating the "new Soviet man". Soviet economic policies have often created additional obstacles to stable family life. Living conditions, particularly shortages of houses for newly-weds, scarcities of daily consumables, and the daily chore of searching for them all impact negatively on the family. [REDACTED]

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Soviet Health Care

According to Soviet data, the USSR is the only industrial nation in the world with a lower life expectancy now than 20 years ago. Death rates rose significantly for every age group between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, increasing 49 percent from its low point in 1964 of 6.9 per 1,000 to 10.3 per 1,000 in 1981. Males in

their forties were hardest hit, with life expectancy for the average Soviet male falling from 66 years in 1965 to the recent figure of 62. Infant mortality rates, moreover, are high, may have risen during the 1970s and reflect sharp differences in the quality of health care available in European and non-European parts of the country. Lowered life expectancy plus high infant mortality rates threaten labor force expansion--a key ingredient in the leadership's strategy to help the economy. [REDACTED]

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Investment in the health care system has declined, which exacerbates these problems. In 1965, 6.6 percent of the budget was allocated to health while in 1982 this figure had dropped to 4.8 percent. At the same time the age distribution of the population has shifted markedly in the past 20 years--with the share of those over 60 increasing from 9.4 to 15.4 percent. The elderly have a higher incidence of serious illness, making greater demands on the health system. The projected economic slowdown, however, could force the Soviet leadership to make further cutbacks thereby compounding the health problems of the population as a whole. Those categories of socially marginal expenditures which are least visible, i.e., health and education, are most likely to be targeted. [REDACTED]

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It is not only the regimes failure to allocate sufficient resources to health care that has led to problems. Lack of preventive care, poor training of medical personnel, and technical

bottlenecks have also taken their toll. A major difficulty is that the Soviet system focuses on curing disease rather than preventing it. Soviet statistical data show that diseases which are easily controlled in other countries run rampant in the Soviet Union. Influenza, for example, kills tens of thousands of babies annually, and rickets remains a serious childhood illness. Whereas 70 percent of cervical cancer cases in the United States are identified early in their potentially treatable stages, 60 percent of Soviet cases are not recognized until they are terminal. [] 25X1

In addition, the Soviet Union's economic plan has given low priority to producing equipment necessary to the practice of modern medicine. According to a published study by a US doctor, the USSR operates only a few dozen kidney machines, and its few hundred available pacemakers are imported. Disposable equipment--syringes, needles, tubing, and bedding--are in short supply. The low priority given to other consumer-oriented sectors results in additional shortages. When output goals in other sectors are not met, the supply to the medical sector of such nonmedical goods as automobiles, building materials, and textiles becomes erratic. Because of fuel shortages, for example, only 30 percent of the gas requirements for emergency vehicles are being met. [] 25X1

The regime has put more pressure on the managers of the health care system by dramatically airing the failures of the Ministry of Health at the March 1982 meeting of the Supreme Soviet Presidium.

The Ministry was criticized for neglect of outpatient polyclinics and emergency care as well as the insensitive and uncaring attitude shown by health service personnel. The press has also extensively publicized the shortcomings of medical care in rural areas and the need for greater responsiveness to the population's requests and complaints regarding health services. Regardless of these resolutions and decrees, unless the regime spends more money on health services, there is little likelihood for significant improvement in the future. [REDACTED]

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Soviet Nationalities

The multi-national character of the Soviet state remains a latent but potentially serious political vulnerability. While Soviet nationality policy* has contained political protest and helped create a non-Russian native elite with a stake in the system, the leadership's hope that modernization and industrialization would cause nationalism to "whither away," has not been realized. Non-Russian ethnic groups continue to maintain their attachment to traditional cultures and resist assimilation into the dominant Russian culture. At times, moreover, minority ethnic bitterness over educational, language and cultural policies that discriminate against them has flared into open political protest. [REDACTED]

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*The granting of linguistic, cultural and to some extent administrative autonomy combined with strong central controls and the presence of Russian overseers.

In fact, the regime may face increasing difficulty in balancing its nationality policy with broader economic and social goals. Although the Soviet leadership has publicly acknowledged the need to improve economic performance, the nationality problem greatly complicates decisions on economic organization. Measures designed to promote flexibility and initiative on the local level are resisted by the leadership because they imply loss of central political control. Resource allocation decisions could become more difficult as well, with Soviet planners facing simultaneous demands for modernizing the industrial plant in European Russia, exploiting the resource-rich areas of Siberia and providing industrial development and needed social services to Central Asia. In an era of declining economic growth, competition among ethnic groups for scarce economic resources could increase along with ethnic resentment that these choices are dictated by Moscow. Minority ethnic groups may become more acutely conscious of their second class political status in the Soviet Union, where they are virtually excluded from the most sensitive political positions and limited to assignments in their own republic with a Russian prefect serving as an important agent of central control. [REDACTED]

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The Baltic. Some of these strains are already apparent in the Baltic where they have led, on occasion, to sporadic violence and dissident activity. The favorable economic conditions in these areas--a comparatively high standard of living, and a good technical base--combined with a manpower shortage have attracted large numbers of Russian immigrants. The continuing influx of Russian settlers has brought with it increased demands for Russian language schools and pressure to use Russian in business transactions. The promotion of Russian at the expense of various Baltic languages has spurred the development of anti-Russian feeling and sparked political protest. Agitation over this issue reached serious proportions in Estonia in the fall of 1980 when thousands of students in Tallinn demonstrated against the compulsory use of Russian and the scarcity of Estonian language publications. [REDACTED]

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Native groups clearly recognize the link between industrialization, Russian immigration and Russification pressures. In Latvia and Estonia, petitions have been circulated by the local citizenry protesting various industrial projects because they would necessitate the importation of Russian workers. In the late 1950s such protests even involved the party elite in Latvia. This nationalist opposition led Moscow to purge much of the native leadership. [REDACTED]

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[redacted] the recent economic slowdown and subsequent deterioration in food supplies has also had a souring effect on relations between the Baltic peoples and their Soviet masters. The Baltic republics have traditionally enjoyed a relatively plentiful supply of meat and dairy products but local citizens now blame the Russians for the reversal in the situation. In late 1976 meat virtually disappeared from Latvian markets. Residents of the republic were convinced that locally produced food stuffs were being exported to the RSFSR. A rash of violent incidents during 1977-78, including the sabotaging of trains headed for the Russian republic and the setting of fires at meat warehouses suggested widespread resentment. [redacted]

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Russification pressures are somewhat less severe in Lithuania due to the predominately rural character of the republic and the small number of Russian immigrants. Lithuanian nationalism, nonetheless, is very strong with the Catholic Church playing a central role. Despite regime pressures on believers and restrictions on the training of new priests, Soviet officials acknowledge that 75 percent of Lithuanians maintain their ties to the Church. In 1979 the Church even spearheaded a petition drive demanding Lithuanian independence. [redacted]

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Although the Baltic people cling tenaciously to their language and culture, long term demographic trends favor the regime's goals of political control and assimilation. Native birth rates are very

low and the influx of Slavic settlers has continued. With time these native groups will become a minority in their own republics. While Moscow's disregard for Baltic sensitivities over language and economic policies may result in continued social strife, in the long run the changing numerical balance will be to the regime's advantage in reducing conflict and in increasing the pressure to assimilate. []

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Central Asia. The demographic trend in Central Asia is opposite of the one in the Baltic. Birth rates in the Muslim republics are from 1.5 to 2.5 times higher than those in predominately Slavic republics and if the present rates continue by the year 2000, 20-25 percent of the Soviet population will be Muslim in origin. Soviet leaders are probably much less sanguine about the ultimate success of policies encouraging assimilation here. []

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The growing population in Central Asia is already increasing pressure on the regime to increase allocations for industrial development and social services to avoid a decline in the standard of living. Central Asian political leaders, conscious of their numerical strength, have demonstrated a good deal of assertiveness in lobbying for pet projects. At the 26th Party Congress in 1981 the party first secretaries in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan pushed for increased funding for water diversion projects. The strong representation of local interests to Moscow could increase over time, exacerbating nationality tensions. []

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Shifting demographic patterns could also have a negative impact on the Soviet military. It is estimated that by the end of the decade Muslims will constitute some 30 percent of the draft pool. These recruits are the least likely to have mastered the Russian language making their assimilation into the armed forces that much more difficult. At present, Central Asian draftees are often relegated to rear services, menial positions and construction troops. Even Defense Minister Ustinov in his Armed Forces Day Address in 1982 acknowledged that Central Asians were under represented in the officer corps and that discriminatory practices against Muslim recruits still prevailed. The presence of a higher percentage of Muslim draftees within the military will place additional pressures on the regime to integrate them more effectively into the military as a whole. [REDACTED]

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The strong grip that the Islamic faith has on the peoples of Central Asia and the strong sense of national identity it fosters is yet another problem for the regime. As an alternative ideology, Islam competes for the loyalty of various Central Asian ethnic groups. The regime has moved directly to counter this threat by limiting the opportunity for religious training and restricting public observance of the faith. Yet, according to Soviet sociologists and Western newsmen, virtually all Soviet Muslims continue to marry in the faith, bury their dead in their own cementaries and observe a host of distinctive customs that the

regime has struggled for years to eradicate. Local officials are troubled, moreover, by the continued existence of Sufi brotherhoods (secret religious groups) which once formed the backbone of the militant anti-Soviet movement in the Caucasus. [REDACTED]

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The Ukraine. The Ukraine, the largest and most politically important non-Russian republic, poses problems for the regime as well. A strong Russian presence has never been established in the Western part of the republic. The Uniate Church, although illegal, remains an active center of nationalist activity. As in the Baltic, the active promotion of the Russian language has created tension between Ukrainians and their masters. Local leaders have also on occasion resisted Moscow's economic directives. Pyotr Shelest eventually lost his Politburo seat--in part--for too vigorously championing Ukrainian interests. While the Soviet leadership has moved quickly to rein in nationalist manifestations, there remains a pervasive sense of Ukrainian ethnic identity and pride in Ukrainian language, culture, and history. [REDACTED]

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Conclusion. Sporadic but considerable nationality discontent still exists in the USSR. The Soviet Union does not, as the Soviets contend, consist "of a single and friendly family of over 100 nationalities jointly building communism." Soviet emigres confirm that ethnic identity matters very much to Soviet citizens and that

there is a wide gap between official claims of ethnic harmony and reality. Although the leadership has so far successfully managed the nationality problem by a mix of tolerance and repression, the potential for destabilization remains. Declining rates of economic growth, the prospect of reduced social mobility or increasing contacts with the outside world could exacerbate nationality tensions. Against this possibility the considerable coercive power of the system and its ability to play one ethnic group against another will probably suffice to keep things under control. 25X1

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